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# Media Release

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## **New study finds almost 90 per cent of WA vape stores are located near a school**

Almost 90 per cent of Western Australia's vape stores are located less than 1km from a school, an Australian first study by The University of Notre Dame Australia has found.

Commissioned by Cancer Council Western Australia and published today in the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, the study also found vape stores in Perth were seven times more likely to be located in low socio-economic areas than in affluent suburbs.

The study identified 194 stores in WA that sold vaping products as a main form of business, with 88 per cent located a short walk from either a primary school or high school. One primary school in Fremantle has two vape stores within 200m.

Mandurah, south of Perth, had the highest number of vape stores, with seven operating within the suburb. Mandurah is also ranked as one of Perth's lowest socio-economic areas. Midland, Cannington, Perth and Rockingham rounded out the top five suburbs, with each being home to six dedicated vape stores.

Study co-author Professor Lisa Wood from Notre Dame's Institute for Health Research said the findings were timely given that students were returning to school this week, and as the Federal Government prepares to tighten vaping regulations to protect young people.

"We know that parents, teachers, and students themselves are struggling with the vaping epidemic in Australia, with recent Australian research finding that 14 per cent of children aged 14-17 currently vape," Professor Wood said.

"We also know that the proximity of vape stores to schools only serves to increase young people's access to these addictive and harmful products. Additionally, it increases their exposure to vape marketing in the form of brightly painted shop fronts and sandwich boards that are often put out on footpaths that children use to get to school, which can help to normalise e-cigarette usage."

Lead author, Notre Dame Research Fellow Dr Matthew Tuson, said the study was the first of its kind in Australia to demonstrate that 'brick and mortar' vape stores were more concentrated in disadvantaged communities.

“We know from overseas studies that the tobacco industry often sets up shop in disadvantaged areas where they can prey on vulnerable populations, and we found the same pattern here with vape retailers,” Dr Tuson said.

“Previous tobacco research has shown that the proximity of tobacco retailers to schools or homes can influence smoking behaviours, and similar relationships have been reported for e-cigarettes.”

The importation of disposable vapes, which are popular with children, ended on 1 January, but further Government reforms to tighten the sale, marketing and manufacturing of e-cigarettes are planned this year.

Public Health Association of Australia CEO, Adjunct Professor Terry Slevin, said measures to close the remaining loopholes were urgently needed to stop the epidemic of young people vaping.

“There has been a rapid explosion of vaping retailers across the country over the last few years,” Professor Slevin said.

“We strongly support the proposed vaping reform measures announced by Health Minister Mark Butler.

“These reforms will ensure comprehensive controls on vapes across all levels of the supply chain. They target retailers – not people who are addicted to vaping. Those addicted smokers who have decided they need vapes to help them quit, will still be able to access them with a prescription and with assistance from a health professional.”

The full version of the study is available here: [https://authors.elsevier.com/sd/article/S1326-0200\(23\)05295-0](https://authors.elsevier.com/sd/article/S1326-0200(23)05295-0)

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